THE MOTHER

The Four Austerities and The Four Liberations

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM
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I

TO pursue an integral education that leads to the supramental realisation a fourfold austerity is necessary and also a fourfold liberation.

Austerity is usually confused with mortification. When austerity is spoken of, one thinks of the discipline of the ascetic who seeks to avoid the arduous task of spiritualising the physical, the vital and the mental life and therefore declares it incapable of transformation and casts it away without pity as a useless burden, a bondage, fettering all spiritual progress; in any case, it is considered as a thing that cannot be mended, a load that has to be borne more or less cheerfully until the time when Nature or the Divine Grace relieves you of it by death. At best life on earth is a field for progress and one should try to get the utmost profit out of it, all the sooner to reach that degree of perfection which will put an end to the trial by making it unnecessary.

For us, however, the problem is quite different. Life on earth, we consider, is not a passage or a means merely; it must become, through transformation, a goal, a realisation. When we speak of austerity, it is not out of contempt for the body, with a view to dissociating ourselves from it, but because of the need of self-control and self-mastery. For, there is an austerity which is far greater, more complete and more difficult than all the austerities of the ascetic: the austerity necessary for the integral transformation, the fourfold austerity which prepares the individual for the manifestation of the supramental truth. Thus one can say, for example, that few austerities are so severe as those which physical culture

demands for the perfection of the body. But of that we shall speak in due time.

Before I begin describing the four kinds of austerity required, I must clear up one question which is a source of much misunderstanding and confusion in the minds of most people: it is about ascetic practices which they take for spiritual discipline. Now, these practices consist in ill-treating the body so that one may, as it is said, free the spirit from it; they are, in fact, a sensual deformation of the spiritual discipline. It is a kind of perverse need for suffering that drives the ascetic to self-mortification. The Sadhu's "bed of nails" and the Christian anchorite's whip and sack-cloth are the results of a sadism, more or less veiled, unavowed and unavowable. It is an unhealthy seeking or a subconscient need for violent sensations. In reality, these things are very far from the spiritual life; they are ugly and low, dark and diseased. Spiritual life, on the contrary, is a life of light and balance, beauty and joy. They have been invented and extolled by a sort of mental and vital cruelty inflicted on the body. But cruelty, even with regard to one's own body, is none the less cruelty, and all cruelty is a sign of great unconsciousness. Inconscient natures need strong sensations; for without that they feel nothing; and cruelty, being a form of sadism, brings very strong sensations. The avowed purpose of such practices is to abolish all sensation so that the body may no longer be an obstacle to one's flight towards the Spirit. The efficacy of the means is open to doubt. It is a well-known fact that if one wants quick progress one must not be afraid of difficulties; on the contrary, it is precisely by choosing to do the difficult thing each time the occasion presents itself that one increases the will and strengthens the nerves. Indeed, it is much more difficult to lead a life of measure and balance, equanimity and serenity than to fight the abuses of pleasure and the obscuration they cause by the abuses of asceticism and the disintegration they bring about. It is much more difficult to secure a harmonious and progressive growth in calmness and simplicity in one's physical being than to ill-treat it to the point of reducing it to nothing. It is much more difficult to live soberly and without desire than to deprive the body of nourishment and clean habits

so indispensable to it, just to show off proudly one's abstinence. It is much more difficult again to avoid, surmount or conquer illness by an inner and outer harmony, purity and balance than to disregard and ignore it, letting it do its work of ruin. And the most difficult thing of all is to maintain the consciousness always on the peak of its capacity and never allow the body to act under the influence of a lower impulse.

It is with this end in view that we should adopt the four austerities which will result in the four liberations. Their practice will constitute the fourfold discipline or tapasya which can be thus defined:

(1) Tapasya of Love
(2) Tapasya of Knowledge
(3) Tapasya of Power
(4) Tapasya of Beauty

The gradation is, so to say, from above downwards; but the steps, as they stand, should not be taken to mean anything superior or inferior, nor more or less difficult nor the order in which these disciplines can be and should be followed. The order, importance or difficulty varies according to the individual and no absolute rule can be framed. Each one should find and work out his own system, as demanded by his capacity and personal need.

Only an overall view will be given here presenting an ideal procedure that is as complete as possible. Everyone will then have to make his own application to the extent and in the manner he can do best.

The Tapasya or discipline of beauty will take us, through the austerity of physical life, to freedom in action. The basic programme will be to build a body, beautiful in form, harmonious in posture, supple and agile in its movements, powerful in its activities and resistant in its health and organic function.

To get these results it would be good, in a general way, to form habits and utilise them, as a help, in organising the material life. For the body works more easily in a frame of regular routine. Yet one must be able not to become a slave to one's habits, however good they may be. The greatest suppleness must be maintained so that one may change one's habits each time it is necessary to do so.

One must build up nerves of steel in a system of elastic and strong muscles, so that one is capable of enduring anything whenever it is indispensable. But at the same time care must be taken not to ask of the body more than the strictly necessary amount of effort, the energy required for growth and progress, shutting out most strictly all that produces exhausting fatigue and leads in the end to degeneration and decomposition of the material elements.

Physical culture which aims at building a body capable of serving as a fit instrument for the higher consciousness demands very severe habits: a great regularity in sleep, food, physical exercises and in all activities. One should study scrupulously the needs of one's body—for these vary according to individuals—and then fix a general programme. Once the programme is fixed, one must stick to it rigorously with no fancifulness or slackness to shake it: none of those exceptions to the rule indulged in just "for once", but which are repeated often—for, when you yield to temptation even "just for once", you lessen the resistance of your will and open the door to each and every defeat. You must put a bar to all weakness; none of the nightly escapades from which you come back totally broken, no feasting and glutting which disturb the normal working of the stomach, no distraction, dissipation or merry-making that only waste energy and leave you too listless to do the daily practice. One must go through the austerity of a wise and well-regulated life, concentrating the whole physical attention upon building a body as perfect as it is possible for it to become. To reach this ideal goal one must strictly shun all excess, all vice, small or big, one must deny oneself the use of such slow poisons as tobacco, alcohol etc. which men have the habit of developing into indispensable needs that gradually demolish their will and memory. The all-absorbing interest that men, without exception, even the most intellectual, take in food, in its preparation and consumption, should be replaced by an almost chemical knowledge of the needs of the body and a wholly scientific system of austerity in the way of satisfying them. One must add to this austerity regarding food, another austerity, that of sleep. It does not mean that one should go without sleep, but that one must know how to sleep. Sleep must not be a fall into

unconsciousness that makes the body heavy instead of refreshing it. Moderate food, abstention from all excess, by itself minimises considerably the necessity of passing many hours in sleep. However, it is the quality of sleep more than its quantity that is important. If sleep is to bring you truly effective rest and repose, it would be good to take something before going to bed, a cup of milk or soup or fruit-juice , for instance. Light food gives a quiet sleep. In any case, one must abstain from too much food; for that makes sleep troubled and agitated with nightmares or otherwise makes it dense, heavy and dull. But the most important thing is to keep the mind clear, to quiet the feelings, calm the effervescence of desires and the preoccupations accompanying them. If before retiring to bed one had talked much, held animated discussions or read something intensely interesting and exciting, then one had better take some time to rest before sleeping so that the mind's activities may be quieted and the brain not yield to disorderly movements while the physical limbs alone sleep. On the other hand, if you are given to meditation, you would do well to concentrate for a few minutes upon a high and restful idea, in an aspiration towards a greater and vaster consciousness. Your sleep will profit greatly by it and you will escape in a large measure the risk of falling into unconsciousness while asleep.

After the austerity of a night passed wholly in rest in a calm and peaceful sleep comes the austerity of a day organised with wisdom, its activities divided between wisely graded progressive exercises, required for the culture of the body and the kind of work you do. For both can and should form part of the physical tapasya. With regard to exercises each one should choose what suits best his body and, if possible, under the guidance of an expert on the subject who knows how to combine and grade the exercises for their maximum effect. No fancifulness should rule their choice or execution. You should not do this or that simply because it appears more easy or pleasant; you will make a change in your programme only when your trainer considers the change necessary. The body of each one, with regard to its perfection or simply improvement, is a problem to be solved and the solution demands much patience, perseverance and regularity. In spite of

what men may think, the athlete's life is not a life of pleasure and distraction; it is a life, on the contrary, made up of well-regulated endeavour and austere habits for getting the desired result and leaves no room for useless and harmful fancies.

In work too there is an austerity. It consists in not having any preference and in doing with interest whatever one does. For the man who wishes to perfect himself, there is nothing like small or big work, important work and others not important. All are equally useful to him who aspires for self-mastery and progress. It is said that you can do only that work best in which you find interest. True, but what is more true is that one can find interest in whatever one does, even the work that appears most insignificant. The secret of this attainment lies in the urge towards perfection. Whatever be the occupation or task that falls to your lot, do it with a will towards progress. Whatever you do must be done not only as well as you can but with an earnestness to do it better and better in a constant drive towards perfection. In this way all things without exception become interesting, from the most material labour to the most artistic and intellectual work. The scope for progress is infinite and one can be earnest in the smallest thing.

This takes us naturally to liberation in action; for in one's action one must be free from all social conventions, all moral prejudices. This is not to say that one should lead a life of licence and unrule. On the contrary you submit here to a rule which is much more severe than all social rules, for it does not tolerate any hypocrisy, it demands perfect sincerity. All physical activities should be organised entirely in such a way as to make the body grow in balance and force and beauty. With this end in view one must abstain from all pleasure-seeking, including the sexual pleasure. For each sexual act is a step towards death. That is why from the very ancient times among all most sacred and most secret schools, this was a prohibited act for every aspirant to immortality. It is always followed by a more or less long spell of inconscience that opens the door to all kinds of influences and brings about a fall in the consciousness. Indeed one who wants to prepare for the supramental life should never allow his consciousness to slip down to dissipation and incon-

science under the pretext of enjoyment or even rest and relaxation. The relaxation should be into force and light, not into obscurity and weakness. Continence therefore is the rule for all who aspire for progress. But especially for those who want to prepare themselves for the supramental manifestation, this continence must be replaced by total abstinence, gained not by coercion and suppression but by a kind of inner alchemy through which the energies usually used in the act of procreation are transmuted into energies for progress and integral transformation. It goes without saying that to get a full and truly beneficial result, all sex impulse and desire must be eliminated from the mental and vital consciousness as well as from the physical will. All transformation that is radical and durable proceeds from within outwards, the outward transformation being the normal and, so to say, the inevitable result of the inner.

A decisive choice has to be made between lending the body to Nature's ends in obedience to her demand to perpetuate the race as it is, and preparing this very body to become a step towards the creation of the new race. The two cannot go together; at every minute you have to decide whether you wish to remain within the humanity of yesterday or belong to the supermanhood of tomorrow. You must refuse to be moulded according to the life as it is and be successful in it, if you want to prepare for the life as it will be and become an active and efficient member. You must deny yourself pleasures, if you wish to be open to the joy of living in integral beauty and harmony.

This brings us quite naturally to vital austerity, the austerity of the sensations, the Tapasya of power. The vital being is indeed the seat of power, of enthusiasms that realise. It is in the vital that thought changes into will and becomes a dynamism of action. It is also true that the vital is the seat of desires and passions, of violent impulses and equally violent reactions, of revolt and depression. The usual remedy is to strangle it, to starve it by depriving it of sensations: indeed it is nourished chiefly by sensations and without them it goes to sleep, becomes dull and insensitive and, in the end, wholly empty.

The vital, in fact, draws its subsistence from three sources.

The one most easily accessible to it is from below, the physical energies coming through the sensations. The second is on its own plane, provided it is sufficiently wide and receptive, in contact with the universal vital forces. And the third, to which generally it opens only under a great aspiration for progress, comes from above through the infusion and absorption of spiritual forces and inspirations.

To these men try more or less always to add another source; it is, at the same time, for them the source of most of their torments and misfortunes. It is the interchange of vital forces with their fellow creatures, generally grouped by twos, which they mistake for love, but which is only an attraction between two forces that take pleasure in mutual interchange.

So, if we do not wish to starve our vital, the sensations should not be rejected, nor reduced in number or blunted in intensity; neither should they be avoided, but they must be utilised with discrimination and discernment. Sensations are an excellent instrument for knowledge and education. To make them serve this purpose, they should not be used with an egoistic purpose, as a means of enjoyment, in a blind and ignorant seeking for pleasure and self-satisfaction.

The senses should be able to bear everything without disgust or displeasure; at the same time they must acquire and develop more and more the power of discrimination with regard to the quality, origin and result of various vital vibrations and so know whether they are favourable to the harmony, the beauty and the good health or are harmful to the poise and progress of the physical and vital being. Moreover, the senses should be utilised as instruments to approach and study the physical and vital worlds in all their complexities. Thus they will take their true place in the great endeavour towards transformation.

It is by enlightening, strengthening and purifying the vital and not by weakening it that one can help towards the true progress of the being. To deprive oneself of sensations is therefore as harmful as depriving oneself of food. But in the same way as the choice of food must be made with wisdom and only with a view to the growth and proper functioning of the body, the

choice of sensations also should be made and control over them gained with a view only to the growth and perfection of this great dynamic instrument which is as essential for the progress as all other parts of the being.

It is by educating the vital, by making it more refined, more sensitive, more subtle, one should almost say, more elegant, in the best sense of the word, that one can overcome its violences and brutalities which are, in general, movements of crudity and ignorance, of a lack of taste.

In reality, the vital, when educated and illumined, can be as noble and heroic and unselfish, as it is now spontaneously, vulgar, egoistic, perverted when left to itself without education. It is sufficient if each one knows how to transform in oneself this seeking for pleasure into an aspiration towards supramental plenitude. For that, if the education of the vital is pursued far enough, with perseverance and sincerity there comes a moment when it is convinced of the greatness and beauty of the goal and gives up petty illusory satisfactions of the senses in order to conquer the divine Delight.

II

WHEN we speak of mental austerity, the thing immediately suggested is long meditations leading to control of thought and finally to inner silence as the crown. This aspect of Yogic discipline is too well-known to need dwelling upon it at length. But there is another aspect with which people are generally less concerned: it is the control of speech. Apart from a very few exceptions, it is absolute silence that is put against unbridled talkativeness. Yet it is a much greater and more fruitful austerity to control one's speech than to abolish it altogether.

Man is the first animal upon earth to be able to use the articulate sound. He is indeed proud of it and exercises the capacity without measure or discrimination. The world is deafened with the noise of his speech and at times you almost seem to miss the harmonious silence of the vegetable kingdom.

It is besides a well-known fact that the less the mental power the greater is the need for speech. There are, for example, primitive people, people with no education, who cannot think at all unless they talk. You can hear them muttering words in a more or less low voice. For it is the only means they have to follow the train of their thought which would not be formulated in them without the spoken word.

There are also a large number of people and even among the educated those with weak mental power who do not know what they have to say except in the course of saying it. That

makes their talk interminable and tedious. But while they speak, their thoughts get more and more clear and precise: and this impels them to repeat the same thing over and over again in order to be able to say it more and more exactly. There are some who need preparing beforehand what they have to say; they falter if they are to speak on the spur of the moment, since they had not the time to work out step by step the exact terms of what they meant to say.

Lastly, there are the born orators who are masters of elocution; they spontaneously find the words needed to say what they mean and they say it well.

All that, however, from the point of view of mental austerity, does not fall outside the category of talkativeness. For by talkativeness I mean uttering any word that is not absolutely indispensable. How to judge, one may ask? For that, we have to classify in a general way all the categories of the spoken word.

First, we have in the physical domain all words uttered for a material reason. They are by far the most numerous and in ordinary life very probably the most useful.

The constant buzz of words seems to be the indispensable accompaniment of the daily routine work. Yet if you just endeavour to reduce the noise to a minimum, you begin to see that many things are done better and quicker in silence and this helps also to maintain the inner peace and concentration.

If you are not alone and you live with others, cultivate the habit not to throw yourself out constantly into spoken words, you will see little by little that an inner understanding has been established between you and the others; you will then be able to communicate with each other with the minimum speech or no speech at all. This outer silence is very favourable to inner peace and if you have good will and constant aspiration you will be able to create an atmosphere conducive to progress.

In a common life with others, to words concerning livelihood and material preoccupations, are to be added also those that express sensations, feelings and emotions. It is here that the habit of external silence comes as a precious help. For when you are assailed by a wave of sensation or feeling, it is this habit of

silence that would give you time to reflect and, if necessary, hold back before you throw out your sensations and your feelings into words. How many quarrels can be avoided in this way! How many times would you be saved from one of those psychological catastrophes which are but too often the result of incontinence in speech.

Even if you do not go to this extreme, you should always control the words you utter and must not let your tongue be moved by an outburst of anger, violence or temper. It is not merely the quarrel itself which is bad in its results; it is the fact that you lend your tongue for the projection of bad vibrations into the atmosphere, for nothing is more contagious than the vibration of sound. By giving those movements the opportunity to express themselves, you perpetuate them in you and in others.

Among the most undesirable kinds of talkativeness should be included all that one says about others.

Unless you are responsible for certain persons as guardian, teacher or departmental head, you have no concern at all with what others do or do not do. You must refrain from talking about them, to give your opinion upon them or upon what they do or to repeat what others may think or say of them.

It may be that the very nature of your occupation makes it your duty to report what is happening in a particular department or business undertaking or a common work. In that case, the report should be confined to the work alone and not to touch personal matters. It should be in every way wholly objective. You must not allow any personal reaction, preference, sympathy or antipathy to enter there. Particularly, never mix up your petty personal grudge into the work assigned to you.

In any case and in a general way, the less one speaks of others, —even if it be in praise of them—the better it is. Already it is so difficult to know exactly what happens in oneself, how to know then with certainty what is happening in others? Refrain then from pronouncing upon any person one of those irrevocable judgments which can only be stupidity, if not malice.

When thought is expressed in speech, the vibration of the sound has a considerable power to put the most material substance

into contact with the thought and thus give it a concrete and effective reality. That is why you must not speak ill of things or persons or speak out in words things that contradict in the world the progress of the divine realisation. It is an absolute general rule. And yet it has an exception. You must criticise nothing unless you have at the same time a conscious power and an active will in you to dissolve or transform the movements or things you criticise. In fact this conscious power and this active will possess the capacity to infuse into matter the possibility to react and refuse the bad vibration and ultimately to correct the vibration so far as to prevent it from expressing itself on the physical plane.

This can be done without danger or risk only by him who moves in the gnostic domain and possesses in his mental faculties the light of the spirit and the force of the truth. He, the divine worker, is free from all preference and attachment; he has broken down in himself the limits of the ego and he is nothing else than a perfectly pure and impersonal instrument for the supramental action upon earth.

There are also all the words that are uttered to express ideas, opinions, results of reflection and study. Here we are in an intellectual domain and we might think that in this region men are more reasonable, balanced and the practice of strict austerity is less indispensable. It is nothing of the kind, however; for even here, into this abode of ideas and knowledge, men have introduced violence of conviction, sectarian intolerance, passion of preference. Here also there will be the same need to have recourse to mental austerity and to carefully avoid all exchange of ideas that leads very often to bitter and almost always inane controversy, avoid too all opposition of opinions which end in hot discussion and even dispute, arising from mind's narrowness, a thing that can be cured easily when one ascends high enough in the mental domain.

Indeed, sectarianism becomes impossible when one knows that all formulated thought is only one way of saying something which escapes all expression. Every idea contains a little of the truth or an aspect of the truth. But there is no idea which is in itself absolutely true.

This sense of the relativity of things is a powerful help to

maintain one's poise and preserve a serene balance in one's talk I heard once an old occultist who had some knowledge saying, "There is nothing which is essentially bad: there are only things that are not in their place. Put each thing in its proper place, you will get a harmonious world".

Yet, from the point of view of action, the value of an idea is in proportion to its pragmatic power. This power, it is true, varies differently according to the individual in whom it acts. A particular idea that has a great driving force in one individual fails totally in another. But the power itself is contagious. Certain ideas have the power to transform the world. It is these that ought to be expressed; they are the guiding stars in the firmament of the spirit, it is they that lead the earth towards her supreme realisation.

Lastly, we have all the words that are spoken for the purpose of teaching. This class extends from the kindergarten right up to the university course, not omitting all the artistic and literary creations of mankind that mean to be either entertaining or instructive. In this region all depends upon the value of the work; and the subject is too vast to be treated here. It is a fact, however, that care for education is very much in vogue nowadays and praiseworthy attempts have been made to make use of the latest scientific discoveries and place them at the service of education. But even in this matter there is need of austerity for the aspirant of the truth.

It is generally taken for granted that in the procedure of education a certain kind of light, entertaining, even frivolous creations should be admitted in order to reduce the strain of the effort, to give ease to the children, even to adults. From a certain point of view this is true; but unfortunately this recognition has served as an excuse for importing a whole class of things which are nothing else than the flowering of all that is vulgar, crude and low in human nature. The most ignoble instincts, the most depraved taste find in this recognition a good excuse to display and establish themselves as inevitable necessities. It is not so. One can relax oneself and yet be not dissolute, one can be at ease and yet not vulgar, one can slacken oneself and yet not allow any of the grosser elements in one's nature to come up. But from the

point of view of austerity, these needs themselves change their nature: relaxation is transformed into an inner silence, ease into contemplation and slackening into felicity.

This need, so generally recognised, of entertainment, relaxation of effort, a more or less long and total forgetfulness of life's goal, forgetfulness of the very reason of existence must not be considered quite natural and indispensable, but as a weakness to which one yields because of the lack of intensity in aspiration, the instability of will, because of ignorance, unconsciousness and listlessness. Do not justify these movements and soon you will perceive that they are not necessary and at some time they will even become to you repugnant and inadmissible. Then quite a large part of human creations, ostensibly recreative, but truly degrading will lose their support and encouragement.

However, one must not believe that the value of the spoken word depends upon the nature of the subject of conversation. One can talk away on spiritual subjects as much as on any other: but this kind of talkativeness may be among the most dangerous. The new sadhak, for example, is always eager to share with others the little he has learnt. But as he advances on the path, he finds more and more that he does not know much and that before trying to instruct others, he must be sure of the value of his knowledge, until finally he becomes wise and realises that a good many hours of silent concentration are needed to be able to speak usefully for a few minutes. Besides, in the matter of inner life and spiritual effort, the use of speech should be put under a still more stringent rule: nothing should be spoken unless it is absolutely necessary to do so.

It is a very well-known fact that one has never to speak of one's spiritual experiences, if one were not to see vanishing in a moment the energy accumulated in an experience which is meant to hasten one's progress. The only exception to the rule allowable is with regard to one's Guru, when one wants to get from him some explanation or instruction about the content and meaning of one's experience. Indeed, it is to the Guru alone that one can speak of these things without danger, for only the Guru, is able, in his knowledge, to turn to your good the elements

of your experience as steps towards new ascents.

It is true also that the Guru himself is under the same rule of silence with regard to what concerns him personally. In Nature everything is in movement and whatever does not move forward is bound to move backward. The Guru, even like his disciple, should also progress, although his progress may not be on the same plane. To him, too, to speak of his experiences is not helpful: the dynamic force contained in the experience, if it is put into words, evaporates in a large measure. On the other hand, by explaining to the disciples his experiences he powerfully helps their understanding and therefore their progress. It is for him in his wisdom to know to what extent he can and should sacrifice the one to the other. It goes without saying that no boasting or vain-glory should enter into his narration; for the least vanity would make of him not a Guru but an impostor.

As for the disciple, I would tell him: "In any case, be faithful to your Guru whatever he may be; he will lead you as far as you are able to go. But if you have the good fortune to get the Divine as your Guru, there will be no limit to your realisation."

Nevertheless, even the Divine when he incarnates upon earth is subject to the same law of progress. The instrument for his manifestation, the physical being with which he clothes himself, should be in a state of constant progress and the law governing his personal self-expression is in a way linked with the general law of earth's progress. Thus even the embodied God cannot be perfect upon earth unless and until men are ready to understand and accept perfection. It will be the day when all will be done out of love for the Divine and not, as now, out of a sense of duty towards Him. Progress will be then a joy, instead of an effort and often even a struggle. Or, more exactly, progress will be through joy in the full adhesion of the whole being and not through coercing the resistance of the ego, which means a great effort and at times even a great suffering.

To conclude I would tell you this: if you want that your speech should express the truth and acquire the power of the Word, do not think beforehand of what you would say, do not decide what would be good or bad to say, do not calculate what

would be the effect of what you are about to say. Be silent in your mind, keep steady in the true attitude, that of constant aspiration towards the All-Wisdom, the All-Knowledge and the All-Consciousness. Then, if your aspiration is sincere, if it is not a mere cover for your ambition to do things well and to be successful, if it is pure, spontaneous and integral, then you will speak simply, you will utter the words that should be uttered, neither more nor less, and they will possess a creative power.

III

OF all austerities this is the most difficult, the austerity of feeling and emotion, the Tapasya of love.

Indeed, it is in the field of feelings more than perhaps in any other that man has the sense of something inevitable and irresistible, a fatality dominating him which he cannot escape. Love (at least the thing to which human beings give that name) is especially looked upon as an imperious master whose caprices one cannot evade, who strikes you as he pleases and compels you to obey him whether you like it or not. In the name of love the worst crimes have been perpetrated, the wildest follies committed.

And yet, man has invented all kinds of moral and social rules hoping to control this force of love, to make it sober and docile. These rules, however, seem to have been made only to be broken and the restraint they impose upon its free activity seems only to increase its explosive power. For it is not by rules that the movements of love can be governed. Only a greater, higher and truer power of love can master the uncontrollable impulses of love. Love can alone rule over love by illumining, transforming and enlarging it. For here also, more than anywhere else, control consists not in suppressing and abolishing, but in transmuting through a sublime alchemy. This is because, of all forces acting in the universe, love is the most powerful, the most irresistible; without love the world would fall back into the chaos of inconscience.

Consciousness is indeed the creator of the universe, but love is

its saviour. A conscious experience alone can give a glimpse of what love is, its wherefore and its how. Any verbal transcription of it is necessarily a mental disguise for that which escapes all expression. Philosophers, mystics, occultists have tried but in vain. I do not pretend that I shall succeed where they failed. My purpose is to tell in the simplest terms possible what under their pen takes such an abstract and complicated form. My words will have no other aim than to lead towards living the experience and I mean to lead even a child.

Love is, in its essence, the joy of identity: it finds its supreme expression in the bliss of union. Between the two there are all the phases of its universal manifestation.

At the beginning of this manifestation, Love is, in the purity of its origin, composed of two movements, two complementary poles of the impulsion towards complete fusion. On one side, it is the supreme power of attraction and on the other the irresistible need of absolute self-giving. No other movement can do better in throwing a bridge over the abyss that was dug in the individual being when its consciousness separated from its origin and became inconscience.

What was projected into space had to be brought back to itself without, however, destroying the universe so created. Therefore Love burst forth, the irresistible power of union.

It has been soaring over darkness and inconscience; it has scattered itself, pulverised itself in the bosom of unfathomed night. And it is from then that there has begun the awakening and the ascent, the slow formation of matter and its endless progression. Is it not love, under an erring and obscure form, that is associated with all the impulsions of the physical and vital nature as the push towards every movement and every grouping? This has become quite visible in the plant world. In the plant and the tree, it is the need of growth to get more light, more air, more space; in the flower it is the gift of beauty and fragrance in a loving efflorescence. And in the animal is it not there behind hunger and thirst, the need for appropriation, expansion, procreation, in brief, behind all desire, whether conscious or not? and, among the higher orders, in the self-sacrificing devotion of the female for

her young ones? This naturally leads us to the human species where, with the triumphant advent of mental activity this association attains its climax, for it is there conscious and deliberate. Indeed, as soon as earth development made it possible, nature took up this mighty force of love to put it at the service of her creative activity by associating and mixing it with the movement of procreation. This association has become so close, so intimate that very few indeed have their consciousness illumined enough to be able to dissociate the two and experience them separately. Thus has love suffered all the degradations and thus it has been lowered to the level of the beast.

It is also from this very moment that there has clearly appeared in Nature's works her will to build up again, by stages and degrees, the primordial unity through groupings more and more complex and numerous. She used the power of love for bringing two human beings together and creating the dual group, the origin of family. Once she had broken the narrow limits of personal egoism by changing it into a dual egoism, she brought into being, with the appearance of the child, a more complex unit, the family. In course of time through manifold association between families, interchange between individuals and blood mixture, larger groupings appeared: the clan, the tribe, the caste and the class to end in the creation of the nation. The work of group formation proceeded simultaneously in different parts of the world; it has crystallised in the formation of the different races. Even these races Nature will by degrees fuse together in her endeavour to build a material and real basis for human unity.

To the consciousness of the majority of men all this appears to be a play of chance in life: they do not observe the existence of a global plan, they take circumstances as they come, well or ill according to their own nature, some are satisfied, others dissatisfied.

Among the satisfied, there is a certain class of men who are in perfect harmony with Nature's way of being: these are the optimists. To them the day is more brilliant because night is there, the colours are bright because of shadows, joy is more intense because of suffering, pain gives a greater charm to pleasure, disease

bestows upon health all its value; I have even heard some saying that they are glad to have enemies, so can they all the more appreciate their friends. In any case, for all such persons, the sexual activity is a most savoury occupation, the satisfaction of the palate one of the delights of life one cannot dispense with; and it is quite natural that being born one must die: it puts an end to a journey which, if it lasted too long, would become tedious.

In short, they find life quite all right as it is and do not care to know if it has a reason or a purpose. They do not trouble over the misery of others and do not see any necessity of progress.

Such people you must never try to "convert": it would be a serious blunder. If, by mischance, they were to listen to you, they would lose their present poise without getting a new one. They are not ready for an inner life. But they are Nature's favourites; they have a very intimate alliance with her and this achievement must not be uselessly disturbed.

At a lesser degree and to a less durable extent, there are other contented ones in the world. Their satisfaction is due to the magic contained in the action of love. Each time a being breaks the narrow limits in which he is imprisoned by his ego, as he soars up into the free air through self-giving, whether it is for the sake of another human being, or for the family or for the country or for his faith, he finds in this self-forgetfulness a foretaste of the marvellous delight of love and this gives him the impression that he has entered into contact with the Divine. But most often it is only a fugitive contact; for in the human being love is immediately mixed with the egoistic lower movements that tarnish it and take away all the power of its purity. Yet, even if it had remained pure, this contact with a divine existence could not endure for ever. For love is only one aspect of the Divine, an aspect that has upon earth suffered the same deformations as the rest.

However, all these experiences are quite good and useful for the ordinary man who follows the normal way of Nature in her wavering march towards the unity of the future. But they cannot satisfy men who are for hastening the movement, who, in other words, aspire to follow another line of movement, more direct and more swift, an exceptional movement that will liberate them from

the ordinary human nature and its endless journey, enabling them to take part in the spiritual progress which will lead them along the quickest path towards the creation of the new race, the race that will express the supramental truth upon earth. These exceptional souls must reject all love that is between human beings; for, however beautiful and pure it may be, it creates a kind of short circuit and cuts the direct connection with the Divine.

One who has known Divine Love, finds all other love obscure, mixed with smallness and egoism and darkness. It looks like a bargain or a struggle for superiority and authority: and even in the best of men, it is full of misunderstanding and sensitiveness, frictions and misgivings.

Moreover, it is a well-known fact that you grow into the likeness of that which you love. If therefore you want to be like the Divine, love Him alone. One who has experienced the ecstasy of the communion of love with the Divine can alone know how insipid, dull and feeble all other love is, in comparison. And even if the most austere discipline is needed to arrive at this communion, nothing is too hard, too long, too severe, provided it takes you there; for it surpasses all expression.

It is this wonderful state that we wish to realise upon earth; it is this which will transform the world and make it a habitation worthy of the Divine Presence. Then will love, pure and true, incarnate in a body that will no longer be a disguise or a veil for it. Many a time the Divine sought, under the supreme form of love, to make the discipline easier and create a closer and more clearly perceptible intimacy; for this he put on a physical body similar in appearance to the human, but always, imprisoned within this gross form of matter, he could express only a caricature of himself. He will be able to manifest himself in the plenitude of his perfection only when human beings have made some indispensable progress in their consciousness and in their body. For man's vanity in its meanness and his stupid conceit take the sublime divine love, when it expresses itself in a human form, as a sign of weakness and dependence and need.

And yet man already knows, obscurely in the beginning, but more and more clearly as he progresses towards perfection that love

alone can put an end to the suffering of the world; the ineffable joys of love in its essence can alone sweep from the universe the burning pain of separation. For only in the ecstasy of the supreme union can creation find its reason of existence and its fulfilment.

No effort, therefore, is too arduous, no austerity too rigorous, if it can illumine, purify, perfect and transform the physical substance so that it may no longer conceal the Divine, when the Divine takes in it an outward form. For that marvel of love will then freely express itself in the world, the love divine which has the power of changing life into a paradise of sweet joy.

This, you may say, is the ultimate end, the crown of the effort, the final victory. But what is to be done to reach there? What is the path to follow and what are the first steps on the way?

Since we have decided to reserve love in its full splendour for our personal relation with the Divine, we shall, in our relation with others, replace it by a whole-hearted, unchanging, constant and egoless kindness and goodwill. It shall not expect any reward or gratitude or even recognition. Whatever the way others treat you, you will not allow yourself to be carried away by resentment: and in your pure unmixed love for the Divine you shall leave him the sole judge as to how he is to protect you and defend you against the ununderstanding and ill will of others.

Your joys and your pleasures you will expect from the Divine alone. In him alone you will seek and find help and support. He will comfort you in all your pain, lead you on the path, lift you up if you stumble, and if there are moments of faintness and exhaustion, he will take you in his strong arms of love and wrap you in his soothing sweetness.

Here, to avoid a possible misunderstanding, I must point out that I am compelled, because of the demand made by the language in which I express myself, to use the masculine form when I speak of the Divine. But, in fact, the reality I speak of as love is above and beyond all gender, masculine or feminine; and when it takes a human body, it chooses the body either of a man or a woman indifferently according to the need of the work to be done.

In short, the austerity of feeling consists in rejecting all emotional attachment, of whatever kind it may be, whether for a

person, for the family, for the country or any other object, and concentrating exclusively on the attachment for the Divine Reality. This concentration will culminate in the integral identification and serve as an instrument for the supramental realisation upon earth.

This takes us quite naturally to the four liberations which will be the concrete forms of the realisation. The emotional liberation will be at the same time a liberation from suffering in the integral realisation of the supramental unity. The mental liberation or liberation from ignorance will establish in the being the mind of light or gnostic consciousness, which will express itself in the creative power of the word.

The vital liberation or liberation from desire gives to the individual will the capacity of identifying perfectly and consciously with the divine will and brings peace and serenity as well as the resulting power.

Finally, crowning all comes the physical liberation or liberation from the law of material causation. Because you are completely master of yourself, you are no longer the slave of the laws of nature that makes you act through subconscious and semi-conscious impulsions and hold you to the rut of ordinary life. Because of this liberation you can decide, with full knowledge, about the path you want to take, choose the action you want to accomplish, and free yourself from all blind determinism, allowing nothing else to intervene in your life's course than the highest Will, the truest Knowledge, the Supramental Consciousness.

Rupee One